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Another Overhaul Planned for U.S. Intelligence

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WASHINGTON—Presidents have been tinkering with the structure of the nation's intelligence services since the Central Intelligence Agency was established in 1947. Now President Carter has joined the club.

His recent decision to strengthen the authority of the CIA director, Admiral Stansfield Turner, and create a high level review committee to draft intelligence requirements is the latest in 30 years of efforts to tighten control over the nation's diverse and expensive intelligence operations.

It's possible, of course, that the Carter program, like most past efforts to reorganize intelligence services, will be just a paper change with no real impact.

But this time there is unusually strong White House and congressional pressure for change in the wake of such bizarre and frightening intelligence abuses as assassination plots and mind-control experiments, disclosed by recent investigations. As a result, the Carter initiative could be a significant step toward streamlining the nation's intelligence operations and improving the quality and timeliness of the intelligence information the President and his top foreign policy team receive.

Under the plan there will be greater emphasis on intelligence about foreign industry, mineral resources and political patterns to supplement the currently heavy dose of purely military intelligence about troop movements and foreign weapons development. It's increasingly clear that intelligence on world food balances and raw material supplies not only help U.S. planners chart economic policies, but also provide important hints about looming political and military crises.

"It's my personal inclination that we are going to want better and more economic intelligence, and we're going to want more information on countries outside the Communist bloc," Adm. Turner says.

Another top administration official notes that in the current world "it may be more important to know about the economic and political development of China than its military system."

It's clear that changes are needed. The past intelligence abuses revealed in congressional investigations drew wide attention. Less spectacular, but more important, are the investigators' conclusions about shortcomings in the organization of the intelligence community.

For instance, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence activities concluded that:

—Intelligence operations are uncoordinated, without sufficient congressional and administrative control. Intelligence collection services at the CIA and the Defense Department had become independent fiefdoms, pursuing their own projects without enough attention to broader national needs. This not only led to abuses but a mis-allocation or duplication of expensive intelligence resources.

—Policy makers who use intelligence frequently can't get the information they need. "Intelligence requirements reflect what intelligence managers think the consumers need and, equally important, what they think their organizations can produce," the panel noted. "Since there are many managers and little central control, each is relatively free to set its requirements."

—The ability to analyze intelligence information hasn't kept pace with the government's increasing technological capacity to collect information through spy satellites and communications intercepts. With satellites "it's much easier to count than to analyze," a Pentagon official notes.

The Carter plan addresses all three of these criticisms.

It gives Adm. Turner control over the nation's intelligence budgets, including the \$5 billion to \$6 billion a year the Pentagon spends on technological collection systems that gather the bulk of the nation's raw intelligence data.

It establishes a committee of Cabinet officers to set intelligence priorities, and another high level panel to assign specific intelligence tasks. These committees will give the Secretaries of State and Treasury, as well as CIA officials, greater influence over the targets selected by the Pentagon's intelligence-collection operations. "You want the consumers to tell you what they need," Adm. Turner explains.

Finally, Adm. Turner plans to try to improve the ability of administration officials to analyze intelligence information and to insure that important facts are reviewed from military, economic, diplomatic and other perspectives. "We want those divergent opinions," an intelligence official declares.

Results from the changes won't come quickly. Many details of the new organization haven't been worked out yet, and it will take several years to alter budget priorities.

The plan also is likely to run into the kind of bureaucratic resistance that has derailed previous efforts to consolidate control of intelligence operations. Pentagon officials understandably are worried that the new priorities may slight the collection of detailed "order of battle" information they currently get about the strength, equipment and location of overseas units.

But "the centralization at least offers the possibility of a better use of intelligence resources," an administration official asserts. At the same time, if it succeeds, the Carter plan should diminish the chance that intelligence agencies will again devote time and money to the kinds of bizarre activities they have undertaken in the past.

It's ironic that after congressional investigators blamed the CIA for the bulk of these abuses Mr. Carter and Congress are backing a plan to concentrate more power in the hands of the CIA director. But it's precisely because of the high-level concern generated by those disclosures that the Carter program has a high chance of success.

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